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ABSTRACT

These two information briefs provide basic information to parents of students with disabilities transitioning from special educational services to adult rehabilitation services. The first brief introduces the rehabilitation services available to youth with disabilities. It explains how the vocational rehabilitation system works, what the Individual Written Rehabilitation Program (IWRP) is, what is included in the IWRP, services available to students in transition, and the application process. The second brief focuses on the right to appeal a decision made by the vocational rehabilitation system. Basic requirements of the IWRP are listed and the right to appeal through formal or informal methods is briefly addressed. (DB)

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National Transition Network

Parent Brief

Information on Vocational Rehabilitation Programs

Part 1 *Winter 1996*

ED 394 259

Rehabilitation Services Available for Youth with Disabilities

Situation: *Your son or daughter with disabilities will be graduating from high school in the next two or three years.*

Strategy: *Begin learning now about the programs and services available through Vocational Rehabilitation to meet his or her needs after high school. Avoid the morning - after - graduation headache of realizing that you'll no longer be working with a public school - whose procedures you may know well. Don't be forced to learn about other agencies and systems at the last minute.* ***Prepare in advance.***

Situation: *You have a disability and you're having a hard time finding and/or keeping a job.*

Strategy: *Learn about the Vocational Rehabilitation programs that are available to serve your vocational needs. They are there to provide training you may need to get and keep the kind of job you want. You must take an active role in seeking out these services in order to develop and/or enhance your job skills.* ***Explore your options.***

Your state Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) agency offers important programs that can be of service to your son or daughter with a disability who may be leaving high school without adequate preparation for the job market, or who is out of school and finding it difficult to find and/or keep a job without additional training. Although considered an adult service agency, in some states VR counselors join the transition team and attend Individual Education Program (IEP) planning meetings before your son or daughter leaves high school. Their involvement may range from getting to know your son or daughter in order to provide transition services at a later date, or they can provide services while she/he is still in school. Check with your state agency to find out what its policies are. Following is an overview of Vocational Rehabilitation and the services it provides for students with disabilities.

How Does the VR System Work?

Vocational Rehabilitation counselors will first work with your son or daughter to assess his/her eligibility for VR services. To be eligible, your son or daughter must have a physical or mental impairment that constitutes or results in a substantial impediment to employment, and be able to benefit in terms of an employment outcome from VR services. Also, your son or daughter must *require* services to prepare for, enter into, or retain employment that meets their ability level.

Once she/he is determined eligible to receive services from Vocational Rehabilitation, a counselor will be assigned to work with your son or daughter, and together they will develop and coordinate the types of assistance she/he will need for employment, including the development of an Individual Written Rehabilitation Program (IWRP).

What is the IWRP?

The IWRP is a written agreement between Vocational Rehabilitation and the client. It is designed by the client and his/her VR case manager to achieve the individual's employment goal, and must be consistent with his/her interests, unique strengths, priorities, abilities, and capabilities.

The National Transition Network is a collaboration of the University of Arkansas; Colorado State University; University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign; University of Minnesota; PACER Center; Technical Assistance for Parent Programs; and the University of Vermont. Its headquarters are at the Institute on Community Integration (UAP), University of Minnesota, Walling Hall, 86 Pleasant Street SE., Minneapolis, MN 55455, (612) 626-8200.

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What is Included in the IWRP?

The IWRP must include a statement, in the words of the client, describing how she/he was informed of, and involved in, choosing among alternative goals, objectives, services, and methods used to provide or obtain these services. It must be provided in the language or other mode of communication of the client and/or his/her parents.

What Services Can My Child Receive?

- Assessment to determine the extent of your son's or daughter's disability.
- Vocational evaluation and counseling to explore your son's or daughter's interests, potential, and limitations.
- Work adjustment training to help your son or daughter understand his/her vocational needs and abilities and the kind of employment she/he may expect to handle successfully.
- Auxiliary aids and services such as interpreters, notetakers, transcription services, TTYs, braille materials and large print materials, when needed by your son or daughter to communicate with his/her counselor.
- Arrangement for vocational training.
- Independent living skills training that supports an employment goal.
- Placement in a suitable job and follow-up assistance to make sure your son or daughter is suitably and safely employed.

How Does My Son/Daughter Apply for Services?

Individuals still in school or their parents, can talk to a teacher or counselor about involving Vocational Rehabilitation in their transition planning. Individuals with disabilities who are no longer in school can also contact Vocational Rehabilitation and apply for services if they need further training to find and/or keep a job.

The easiest way to find the Vocational Rehabilitation office nearest you may be to call your Directory Assistance and ask for the State Vocational Rehabilitation Agency. A disability advocacy organization should also be able to refer you to the appropriate agency/office. The National Rehabilitation Information Center (NARIC) can also refer callers to their state Vocational Rehabilitation office. (NARIC phone number is 1-800-346-2742.)

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Parent Brief

Information on Vocational Rehabilitation Appeals Procedure

Part 2 *Winter 1996*

Did You Know You Have the Right to Appeal Any Decision Made by Vocational Rehabilitation?

What is an appeal?

An appeal is a request for someone of a higher authority to reconsider a decision made by a rehabilitation counselor. If your son or daughter has applied for, or is receiving Vocational Rehabilitation services, she/he has the right to appeal any decision made by the counselor or coordinator concerning services.

What should happen?

- Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) must give written notification of the right to appeal, including information about the Client Assistance Project (CAP). This information is provided at the time of application for services and when the Individual Written Rehabilitation Plan (IWRP) is developed.
- Notification of these rights must also be given if Vocational Rehabilitation decides your son or daughter is not eligible for services, or if VR wants to suspend, reduce, or terminate services being provided under the Individual Written Rehabilitation Plan (IWRP) without your agreement.
- If your son or daughter appeals a change in her/his IWRP, the services in question must be continued until a final decision is made, unless services were obtained through misrepresentation, fraud, collusion or criminal conduct.

If you are a person with a disability who is receiving or thinking of applying for Vocational Rehabilitation services, or a parent whose son or daughter is going to be applying for services, this article contains information you should know.

The Rehabilitation Act states that persons with disabilities must be full partners in the development of their Individual Written Rehabilitation Plan (IWRP) (see *Part 1: Rehabilitation Services Available for Youth with Disabilities*, for further information on Vocation Rehabilitation programs and services and the IWRP). This includes making informed choices about goals and the kinds of support needed to obtain them. Your son or daughter has a right to a program that will assist him/her in obtaining a job that utilizes his/her abilities and capabilities. Your son's or daughter's program must:

- be jointly developed by, agreed to, and signed by your son or daughter and his/her counselor.
- be consistent with what your son or daughter wants to do.
- include a statement, in your son's or daughter's words, describing his/her participation.

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- be provided in the mode or language your son or daughter uses, or if appropriate, his/her family member or advocate.
- be described in a written plan and your son or daughter must be given a copy.

The IWRP must be reviewed annually. Changes can be made at any time, but will not take effect until agreed to and signed by your son or daughter and his/her counselor.

If there is disagreement about the change, your son or daughter has the right to appeal.

Let's say your son or daughter applies for Vocational Rehabilitation services and is found eligible. As part of his/her Individual Written Rehabilitation Program, your child wants Vocational Rehabilitation to cover the costs of a specific training program that she/he believes would enable him/her to reach a personal vocational goal.

The counselor, however, believes there is no disability-related reason for your child's requests. The counselor and your son or daughter try to reach an agreement but cannot. Dissatisfied with the counselor's final decision, your son or daughter decides to appeal.

What are your child's options for appeal?

Typically states have an informal and a formal method of appeal. The informal method is a review that may be done by the counselor's supervisor and/or a higher authority. The formal method involves an impartial hearing officer who would hear both sides of the dispute. The impartial hearing officer may be provided with additional evidence and information from either party.

If your son or daughter is having difficulties with Vocational Rehabilitation, the Client Assistance Program (CAP) may be able to help. Every state has a Client Assistance Program to provide information and assistance about the available benefits and rights of applicants and consumers of Vocational Rehabilitation.

The CAP can also advocate for applicants and consumers and assist them in their appeal, and may help with legal and administrative services, if appropriate.

Conclusion

The Rehabilitation Act, amended in 1992 regulates Vocational Rehabilitation in every state. The law states that work is a valued activity. Work fulfills the need of an individual to be productive, promotes independence, enhances self esteem, and allows for participation in the mainstream of life in America.

People with disabilities have demonstrated that they have the ability to achieve employment and compete in the American mainstream if appropriate services and supports are provided.

The future will always bring change and we may experience amendments to the current law and service delivery system. It is important for persons with disabilities, their family members, advocates, and professionals to continue to work together. We must ensure that the concept of empowering persons with disabilities is maintained and continues to guide the system.

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